

MIRJAM THOMANN Alliance

Opening: Friday, September 8, 2023, 6 – 9 pm
Exhibition: September 9, 2023 – January 13, 2024

PRESS RELEASE

Thomann's Buildings

Mirjam Thomann's newest series "Wall" (2023) consists of variously formatted large-scale drawings, meticulously drawn by hand. Countless lines form blocks and their proportion and pattern reveal them to be bricks. Bricks are laid in courses and the patterns are known as bonds, and Thomann's bricks, too, build towards signification, doing so in a nearly universal and ancient architectural language.

In his dialogue with his son, Augustin of Hippo argues that you can point at the wall, but not at the three-syllables word *pa-ri-es* for the wall; so it's "impossible to signify gesturally the components of a sign even if the sign is for something as concrete as a wall."ⁱ Thomann's "Wall" is a sign and it is concrete, and it does this by indexing the time its construction (brick by brick) takes, a laborious and repetitive process.

Renee Gladman writes and [...] will mark her repeated return in this text.: "There had to be a secret society of people working on this invisible architecture. How could there not be? There were phantom structures being built on top of and in between ... what would you call them? Real structures, concrete structures?"ⁱⁱ

Installed so as to register and activate the latent organization of the gallery space, the drawings operate like sculptures. "Wall" adds a layer of abstraction that reveals the idea of the space and the calculability of the physical and disciplinary forces acting on it. Lodged between the intricate miniature scale of the bricks and the large format of the drawings, the viewer's body is inevitably refracted, its proportions and position called into question.

"[...] here was my body, and it was with this body (enclosed in it) that I left the house that morning and it was with the same body that I returned."ⁱⁱⁱ And, "[...] I hoped to reach a point in speaking where when it was time to say 'body' I could go silent instead."^{iv}

Thomann's drawings extrapolate a space inhabitable only by a body aligned with alterity, a body that knows of its fundamental improbability. A body made of bricks and in brackets: The coincidentally identical body is merely enclosed in a space also called the body. It's tempting to think of that space as abstract and empty (minimalism may have done so), but it is blissfully overdetermined, all limb, awkward and teeming with the eponymous alliances, accidental and otherwise. Thomann's spatial drawings return the exhibition space to a definitionally compromised and dependable state, indivisible from the bodies traversing it, outlining what needs are built in and which ones are painstakingly ignored.

"[...] architecture shatters into an interior revelation."^v

In "Interior Castle", the 16th century mysticist Theresa von Avilas superimposes her journey to enlightenment onto seven successively arranged mansions. The rock-solid architecture of the metaphoric crystal-like castle is misleading though. With each mansion representing a different inner state, the architecture doesn't separate which is already separated but that which needs separation. The problem

is not distance but proximity, messiness, the familiar. The spatial organization is itself an effect of the meditation and introspection required, and the labor of orientation.

"[...] an interior revelation" or "[...], some place where a boundary has broken"^{vi}

The second work in the space is "Window" (2022/2023), a site-specific installation that consists of multiple rows of salt bricks, stacked to obstruct most of the gallery's front window. Flesh-colored and made from salt, the translucent wall simultaneously connects and separates inner and outer space. "Window" returns to this over-determined separation of spaces a fleshly density, something that invites the touch.

"[...] about the body I know very little though I am steadily trying to improve myself, in the way animals improve themselves by licking. I have always wanted to be sharp and clean."^{vii}

A space with and without a window recalls the legend behind the "Teufelstritt" at the nearby late Gothic – materially speaking, think bricks – cathedral *Frauenkirche*, a tailed footprint in bronze inserted into the church's stone floor. According to legend, the footprint was left behind by a triumphant devil, who – from that particular position – could not see any windows. "Floor" (2023), the third series in the show, consists of three footprints of shoe soles in unglazed ceramics. Offering something like the inverse of the Early Renaissance central perspective, the work purposefully misaligns and multiplies perspectives, interpolating positioning and in extension orientation as something that's virtually continuous and phenomenologically contingent. This includes the relationship between the exhibited works, that is rendered a specific effect of various delineated perspectives.

Whether the footprints were left behind by Thomann herself or someone else remains unclear; as a trace or marker, they suggest a continuation behind Thomann's body and that of the viewer, undoing an exhausted distinction, and uncoupling the aesthetic experience from a sovereign subject (historically white, male and abled) position.

"[...] There continues to be a suggestion that we are somehow surrounded by other spaces in which exciting, ungraspable things occur."^{viii}

In Clarice Lispector's "The Passion According to G.H.", Lispector uses the last line of each chapter as the first line of the following chapter. The effect, according to Robert Glück, is that the focus is shifted away from the paragraph, and to the sentence, less narrative, more construction. Glück concludes: "The Passion According to G.H.' finished me more than I finished it" – lines suggest their continuation.^{ix} *Alliance* may well be understood in similar terms. The lines drawn by Thomann, whether those are drawn or lines of sight, model an architecture that's irreducible to one position, immobilizing fantasies of ownership and completion, while generating the kind of spaces some of us find actually inhabitable because they only make sense when shared.

Christopher Weickenmeier

ⁱ Earl Jackson, Jr., "Writing Internal Distances: Renee Gladman's Translucent Poetics", *Tripwire* (15), 2019, 127-128.

ⁱⁱ Renee Gladman, *Houses of Ravicka*, (St. Louis: Dorothy Project, 2017), 122-123.

ⁱⁱⁱ Renee Gladman, "The Sentence as a Space for Living: Prose Architecture", *Tripwire* (15), 2019, 95.

^{iv} Renee Gladman, *Calamities*, (Seattle/New York: Wave Books, 2016), 89.

^v Bruna Mori, "Review of Houses of Ravicka", *Tripwire* (15), 2019, 131.

^{vi} Renee Gladman, *Houses of Ravicka*, 100.

^{vii} Gladman, "The Sentence as a Space for Living", *Tripwire* (15), 2019, 92.

^{viii} *Ibid*, 106.

^{ix} Robert Glück, "The Passion According to G.H.", *Tripwire* (15), 2019, 215.